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## Rep. Waxman – legislative craftsman, savvy politico – won't run again

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Rep. Henry Waxman, February 13, 2008

CHUCK KENNEDY — MCT

WASHINGTON — Veteran Rep. Henry Waxman of California announced Thursday that he'll retire when his term expires, capping a decades-long political career in which the Los Angeles Democrat significantly

shaped national policy, statewide politics and Capitol Hill tactics.

As a nuts-and-bolts congressman for the past 40 years, Waxman has helped expand health care, police food safety and clean the nation's air. As a savvy insider, he helped pioneer fundraising as a career tool. And as one of the few surviving members of the House of Representatives' post-Watergate class of 1974, Waxman has a rare ability to both cut a deal and craft a liberal message.

"I first ran for office because I believe government can be a force for good in people's lives," Waxman said in a statement Thursday. "I have held this view throughout my career in Congress. And I will leave the House of Representatives with my conviction intact."

After serving more than half his life in the House, the 74-year-old lawmaker said he'd step down when the congressional term expires at the end of the year. Combined with the previously announced impending retirement of fellow 40-year House veteran Rep. George Miller, D-Calif., Waxman's departure will sap considerable seniority from the state's Democrat-dominated congressional delegation.

"He has an unequalled record of achievement on so many areas of public policy, particularly health, environmental and consumer issues," his former Los Angeles-area colleague Howard Berman said in an interview Thursday, calling Waxman's departure a "great loss for the country and California."

Berman, who lost his own long-held House seat in a 2012 Democratic primary, had worked closely with Waxman since their days at UCLA and UCLA Law School in the early 1960s. For many years, they and Berman's brother Michael, a behind-the-scenes political operator, led what became known as the "Waxman-Berman machine." The close allies used fundraising, endorsements and redistricting, all the tools of the trade.

In Waxman, the nitty-gritty, and occasional hardball, coincided with a long track record of serious legislating.

"I always thought that he was a political animal, but also a person of high integrity," said former Fresno, Calif.-area Congressman John Krebs, a Democrat who was elected to the House the same year as Waxman. "I never had the feeling that he was, quote, selling out. He had his principles, and he followed them."

The pragmatic and the idealistic came together on certain key occasions, as in a hard-fought 1989 deal that Waxman finally struck with Michigan Democrat John Dingell to update the Clean Air Act.

The longtime adversaries hammered out a compromise on controlling so-called mobile source pollution – emitted from motor vehicles and airplanes – with Waxman securing tighter tailpipe-emission standards that effectively matched those already in place in California. The provisions, and others, became the Clean Air Act amendments of 1990.

The historic clean-air compromise, though, wasn't a permanent peace treaty, and it didn't quell all ambition. Some 18 years later, Waxman toppled the then-82-year-old Dingell to claim the chairmanship of the Energy and Commerce Committee, traditionally one of the most powerful in the House.

"Henry will leave behind a legacy as an extraordinary public servant and one of the most accomplished legislators of his or any era," President Barack Obama said Thursday in a statement.

Waxman had previously chaired the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, where he held the Bush administration's feet to the fire and, in the words of its current chairman, Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., "set important precedents and innovated new investigative tools."

The president of the Natural Resources Defense Council, Frances Beinecke, said Waxman had been a "stalwart champion" of the environment and public health, while Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein of his home state called him "among the most special people I have ever known."

Only four members of the 435-member House have served longer than Waxman or Miller, who took their initial oaths of office Jan. 3, 1975. That day was sunny, the temperature was unseasonably moderate and the House was abuzz with energy after the influx of dozens of new Democratic members. Waxman, an

attorney who'd served six years in the California State Assembly, began standing out quickly despite his modest stature.

"As time went on, he certainly became more of a leader," Krebs said.

Adroitly, though not without some controversy, Waxman deployed political donations to climb the Capitol Hill ladder. Though so-called leadership political action committees are now commonplace in Congress, they were essentially unheard-of in 1978, when Waxman began spreading donations among fellow members of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

At the time, he was a 39-year-old sophomore lawmaker who was trying to beat out a 59-year-old combat veteran and fifth-term House member from North Carolina named Richardson Preyer for the chairmanship of what was then the Health and Environment Subcommittee. With the help of his contributions, Waxman won the post, which he later used in rewriting the Clean Air Act.

What Waxman helped begin politically has also since metastasized.

During the 2012 election cycle, some 450 congressional leadership PACs contributed a total of \$46.4 million to federal candidates, according to data compiled from the Center for Responsive Politics, a nonpartisan campaign-finance watchdog group. Waxman himself spent \$2.6 million in his own 2012 campaign, a surprisingly close race in which independent candidate Bill Bloomfield held him to a 54 to 46 percent win.

"I have learned that progress is not always easy," Waxman said. "It can take years of dedication and struggle. But it's worth fighting for."

David Lightman contributed to this article.

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